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P. Malone '62 (1)

Prof. Thomas
Pile.

A Summary of Reports by the Philosophy Departments of Twenty-seven Jesuit Colleges and Universities on the Role of Philosophy as an Academic Discipline to the Jesuit Educational Association in 1962

Each department was asked to state its conception of (a) the objectives of their teaching of philosophy, (b) the subjects and methods of their curricula and (c) to comment on the orientation and preparation of their teachers. My summary will be restricted to the first two points.

At first glance these reports show an amazing unanimity on the objectives, function and content of philosophy. Of the 27 colleges and universities reporting, only seven (John Carroll, Detroit, St. Peter's, San Francisco, St. Louis, Cahisius and Loyola of Chicago) submitted minority reports or reports by individuals, and of these seven only three (John Carroll, Loyola of Chicago and Detroit) indicated in their reports that there were any basic disagreements within their departments. At least in quantitative terms, then, one could conclude that within each of the great majority (24) of philosophy departments there is not too much controversy concerning the nature and function of philosophy.

If one undertakes a comparison of the 27 departments, the situation seems to be somewhat similar. Again quantitatively, this reader concluded that there was a strong current of unanimity among the 27 reports -- so much so that in the end I had to conclude that only three departments (Georgetown, Loyola of New Orleans and St. Peter's) seriously criticized or reported any major departures from what the other 24 were doing in philosophy. And even here, the criticism on the part of Georgetown seemed mainly vocal, for they indicated no

anticipated changes in curriculum or methods. Thus, of the 27 departments only two (St. Peter's and Loyola of New Orleans) reported any major variation from the other 25 both in theory and in practice in their view of the nature and function of philosophy.

What is this view of philosophy, then, on which the great majority of philosophy departments are so unanimous? And how and why and how deeply does this small minority of three departments differ from the majority of twenty-four?

Surely on a second reading there are considerable differences among these reports. Some, for example, are only two or three sentences in length; others are as long as four or five pages, not including some very lengthy minority reports and reports of individual members of the departments. Despite the danger of missing other differences, the following four general categories seemed to be the most relevant and useful in determining the kind and degree of their differences; most departments, including minority reports and individual reports, seemed to conceive of their role as either: (1) teachers of Scholastic Philosophy; (2) teachers of Scholastic Christian Philosophy; (3) merely teachers of Philosophy; and (4) teachers of Christian Philosophy. The meaning of these categories and the reason for their choice can perhaps be best explained by considering each one in turn.

(1) Scholastic Philosophy. Of the twenty departments expressing any specific conception of philosophy, (seven reports were either so brief or so vague as to make classification impossible), ten conceived of their task as the teaching of Scholastic philosophy. The reasons given are at least four in number: it is the true philosophy; its truth is perennial; it is a practical philosophy; and it is in

accordance with the Catholic Religion. The Santa Clara department offers all four of these as reasons for its commitment to Scholastic philosophy and adds that one of its chief functions is to provide the presuppositions and rational basis of the student's religious faith (P.78). Creighton is even more specific, considering its function specifically as the teaching of the philosophy of St. Thomas. Indeed, this department also urges that the philosophy program be integrated with a curriculum in Thomistic theology (P.22). (And in urging such an integration their Thomism seems to me quite consistent with the actual thought of Aquinas). San Francisco and Loyola of Los Angeles also suggest an integration of the philosophy and theology departments. And Scranton, Loyola of Baltimore, Xavier, Regis and John Carroll all insist on the importance of Scholastic philosophy for the understanding of scholastic theology. But Spring Hill and St. Joseph's seem puzzled (and I think rightly) over the relation of scholastic philosophy to scholastic theology since they find that theology departments are teaching little if any ^{speculative} scholastic theology. St. Louis and Seattle, on the other hand, view the teaching of the truths of scholastic philosophy as ^{an} _A end in itself and hold that, since speculative scholastic theology is too advanced for undergraduates, the philosophy program should not be directed to any such aim at all. (To this reader this last position seems to imply a somewhat dubious substitution of philosophy for theology.)

Several departments attempted to define the intrinsic merits of scholastic philosophy. Loyola of Chicago finds in philosophy a true practical guide for living in that it provides the "true principles for life, conduct and culture." But a minority report of

R. Armanentos not only dissents but claims, in what is one of the most detailed and strongest criticisms of all the reports, that such a program is having precisely the opposite effect on the graduates of Jesuit schools. Xavier sees philosophy as necessary for the training of a "lay apostolate" (but whether this apostolate is to announce the good news of Scholasticism or of Christianity is not clear). Wheeling College holds that the exclusive teaching of Scholastic Philosophy "trains the students' critical powers". Just how this is done is not explained.

Two minority reports, A. J. Smith, S.J. of San Francisco and "View II" of the John Carroll department, are in favor of both a curriculum oriented around scholastic philosophy and also the teaching of symbolic logic and modern and contemporary philosophy. The latter are regarded as essential in order that the student can "understand" his contemporaries. Both views, however, still tend to some degree to consider this "understanding" as defending scholastic philosophy or being able to refute adversaries. And just how such a program is possible in terms of time and curriculum is not explained.

Finally, Dr. K. Payzs of Detroit offers a defense of the exclusive orientation of departments to scholastic philosophy (pp.171-176), in that any other procedure is either impracticable because of time or would be "confusing for the student".

(2) Scholastic Christian Philosophy. Unlike the foregoing departments whose commitment to Scholastic philosophy is primarily on the basis of its own intrinsic merits, four schools (Marquette, Gonzaga, Rockhurst and Canisius) and one individual report believe that their function is to teach Christian Philosophy. But they immediately go on to assume that the only authentic Christian Philosophy

is Scholastic Philosophy (if not more specifically, Thomistic Philosophy). Thus, for example, philosophy is identified with, "the knowledge that nature is open to God," (Marquette, Pp.1-4) and their subsequent exposition of such a Christian philosophy is quickly restricted to a Scholastic philosophical position. Rockhurst (pp.30-31) seems to reach the same position negatively, for while insisting that their function is to teach philosophy which is open to the Christian faith they also reject all modern and contemporary philosophies. Canisius (pp.34-40) is even more explicit, asserting without further ado that "Scholastic philosophy is the only philosophy which is open and properly subordinate to Revelation" (P.36). Carl Burlage, S.J. of Loyola of Chicago offers a lengthy defense (pp.11-23) for the exclusive teaching of Thomism as the Christian philosophy precisely because of its theological orientation. But these departments who conceive of their role as teachers of Scholastic philosophy because it is Christian philosophy seem to be in no better position to elaborate the relation of scholastic philosophy to the teaching of theology. Thus, for Father Burlage the chief merit of such an approach to philosophy is that it is the best way to make philosophy interesting to students who are for the most part Christians. But while conceiving philosophy to be fides quaerens intellectum, he does not offer us any distinctive conception of theology nor does he explain how philosophy is to be related, if at all, to undergraduate theology. To be sure he does point out that "the demand for the understanding of Faith is a demand for the understanding of nature," and that "it is the need for Theology which (in the believing Christian) postulates and imposes the need for Philosophy," But he would not seem to allow for philosophy any other role (e.g. the role of integrating other knowledges) than its theological one, nor does he consider

the possibility there might be other Christian philosophies which could, and perhaps already have, become theologically relevant and useful. The latter possibility would seem worthy of attention in the light of recent non-Scholastic theological inquiries which are developing with considerable independence from any scholastic philosophy.

(3) Philosophy. Those departments which appear to conceive of their role as just teachers of philosophy form another group of five departments.

First of all, I would place the Detroit report in this group. This department came to the conclusion that though they are more than just teachers of philosophy, they are so only for "non-philosophical reasons" (P.34). Their silence about what these "non-philosophical reasons" are led me to suppose that they considered themselves to be "pure" philosophers and so unable (or unwilling?) to discuss matters which they conceived to be outside their discipline.

Secondly, Seattle seems to have no conception of philosophy at all, though they extoll the values of philosophy for life and its liberalizing, humanizing values in an age of specialization and technology. This love of wisdom is indeed inspiring, but just how they, or anyone, are to succeed in realizing this Aristotelian ideal in the contemporary context is not discussed.

Loyola of Los Angeles points out (and I think rightly) that no systematic philosophy can be taught to undergraduates without first introducing them to some history of philosophy. They also insist that philosophy should be taught "Socratically" rather than "dogmatically" and then imply that it can be taught in the former way only if the student already has something to discuss which he has attained

through previous study of at least some of the texts of the philosophers themselves.

Thirdly, there are two departments (Georgetown and Loyola of New Orleans) who appear to fall into this classification because of their criticism and rejection of any exclusive commitment to a systematized Thomism or Scholasticism. Georgetown offers a lengthy and reasonable critique of the systematic teaching of scholasticism to undergraduates (pp. 4-5 and 63-65). They argue convincingly that most of the flaws of textbook scholasticism for undergraduates arise because the philosophy curriculum for laymen has been oriented around the philosophy curriculum for the seminary. They argue that such an orientation has not succeeded since philosophy for the layman is not primarily a tool for further studies in speculative theology. Hence they urge a curriculum which is more open to other philosophical positions. But their conception of their positive rôle is not explained, though they are quite explicit in holding that their rôle is not merely to be teachers of systematic textbook scholasticism. They also urge that theology departments be developed independently of philosophy departments (pp. 86-87). They point out that there is in most schools a considerable amount of overlapping in the theology and philosophy courses, e.g. in ethics and moral theology. In this connection they also believe that the theology department should

though they seem quite convinced that most philosophy departments have often been doing the work of weak theology departments.

Loyola of New Orleans offers little overt criticism of the

(proposed?) program that they would depart from it considerably. They propose that the teaching of philosophy not be based upon textbook scholasticism (pp.47-48): "It (philosophy) should not engage in mere indoctrination into the answers given by a particular system, e.g. Thomism, but should attempt to make the student see what is and what is not a philosophical problem." Other departments are admonished: "We stress the use of reason and then fall into the pitfall of discouraging the student from using reason originally." "Not enough attention is given in our Philosophy courses to primary sources. Admittedly it may be tough going for a freshman to plow through the original Aristotle, Plato, St. Thomas, Kany et al. But how else can our students learn the problems that have vexed philosophers for centuries and formulate an answer of their own?"

Finally, it may be noted that these five departments, with the exception of Seattle and Detroit, appear to be advocating the teaching of philosophy only without any further qualification that it be Christian, Scholastic or Thomist. This is probably only appearance, however, arising from their strong criticism of other more restricted conceptions of philosophy. Georgetown, Loyola of Los Angeles and Loyola of New Orleans (along with the aforementioned report of R. Armamentos of Loyola of Chicago) all offer very convincing criticisms of a narrow, overly systematic textbook scholasticism. None, however, seem to provide a solid rationale for what they do conceive philosophy to be, despite their many positive suggestions for a more philosophical teaching of philosophy.

(4) Christian Philosophy. Our last grouping, those who conceive of their task as the teaching of Christian philosophy, though it is by far the smallest minority, nevertheless constitutes in my opinion the most interesting, sound and realistic conception of philosophy. Only one department (St. Peter's) appears, at least at the time of their report, to have embarked on this course. The spokesman for this department, Fr. Wm. Richardson, S.J., the lengthy paper of Dr. Haymond of John Carroll (pp.125-170) and my own very brief and sketchy report (pp.27-28) all advocate a philosophical teaching of philosophy which is at the same time frankly and explicitly interested and at times committed to philosophies which not only do not contradict Revelation, but which are or could be useful for theological understanding or are at least relevant for such an understanding.

Of these reports, the three reports of Fr. Richardson (pp.44-45; pp.137-170) are by far the most detailed and complete. In the first he summarizes his conception of undergraduate philosophy as follows:

"The function of the philosophy course, then, is not essentially the indoctrination in a system but the communication of an experience of the mind in search of ultimate meaning throughout the course of human history. The experience is essentially historical. ... If there are privileged moments in this history, the reason is that at some given time a thinker of stature achieves a new synthesis that culminates one epoch of history and at the same time founds another. Such was the synthesis of St. Thomas. ... Essential to the Christian experience, however, is the fact that God entered history. The Thomistic synthesis can claim to be a "Christian" philosophy, then, only to the extent that it, too, remains historical, sc. submits to the exigencies of passing time. This will mean that on the one hand it will keep its insight fresh by a continual return to ~~the~~ sources, and on the other sustain a sympathetic dialogue with subsequent thinkers so as to incorporate as far as possible all that is valid in their thought."

"To conceive philosophy as essentially historical is not, of course, to reduce it to relativism. ...what it does make impossible is the assumption that problems and solutions in philosophy are a fait accompli."

In accordance with this conception of philosophy he then proposes (pp.137-142) a curriculum which combines the choice of a topic or problem (e.g. the nature of man, knowledge, reality, value, etc.) with the study of selected primary sources as answers to this problem. One might quarrel with his selection of only one problem and with his choice of man as the only problem, but it is clear that his general proposal combines the advantages of the systematic and historical approaches to the teaching of philosophy and yet compensates for the excesses of each. Moreover there does not seem to me to be any reason why these courses must be arranged in chronological order rather than in the logical order of topics.

Finally, Fr. Richardson offers a lengthy discussion (pp.137-170) of the whole question of the role of ethics in undergraduate Christian education. Pages 143-146, in my opinion, offer penetrating and serious reasons for dropping ethics as a required philosophy course for all undergraduates. The remainder of his paper proposes a quite different sort of course on the morality of the person which, because it would contain much religious and theological content, he believes should be taught by a theologian. The following seems to summarize his (as well as perhaps many other people's) criticism of philosophical ethics:

"At present the student's theoretic training in the moral life is imparted by the course in ethics. By this we understand an examination of moral principles that is purely philosophical in character, sc. gained by the light of unaided natural reason. But is such a course adequate to give the student an intelligent understanding of the moral commitment he himself is called to make, when unaided reason is blind to the super-natural scope of this commitment and helpless to speak either of the motive union with Christ) or the means (divine grace) to fulfill it?

Let it be clearly understood that we do not question for a moment either the possibility of discerning a natural ethics nor the positive advantages of doing so. Quite possibly ethics has a significant role to play in the formation of a seminarist (this is another matter). Certainly it is important in the

graduate training of the professional philosopher, perhaps even for the undergraduate philosophy major.

What we question is the utility of such a course for the general consumption of the normal undergraduate who must depend upon it for his whole theoretical training in a personal moral life that is never (and from all eternity was never) meant to be lived in purely natural terms.

What we question is the prudence of such a course in exposing the undergraduate mind to the ravages of rationalism in matters of personal morality, i.e. to the risk of believing that his moral life can be guided by purely natural norms, precisely at that period in his development when it is critically important for him to realize that one need not become a rationalist in order to lead one's life in an intellectually satisfying way.

What we question is the practicality of such a course, which analyses with great finesse the pros and cons of such controversial matters as birth control, the indissolubility of marriage, etc. and arrives at conclusions which may satisfy the teacher (protected as he is by maturity, community life, constitutions, vows) but do not always convince the student — leave him rather on the threshold of his career in marriage and the world, divided within himself between a position he finds rationally unconvincing and blind obedience to the Church.

The tendency of ethicists, in defending the prerogatives of reason, to exaggerate its significance for the practical life of the Christian is what we designate here by the term "ethical rationalism". In itself, it is not sufficient for the Christian as a theoretical foundation for his moral life."

R.C. Himmers
Dept. of Philosophy
Loyola College, Montreal
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